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Job Scam Threatens Utahns

An insidious scam, using classified ads promising jobs, the Internet and forged checks has resurfaced in Utah. The scam threatens Utahns bank accounts and their personal information. According to officials with the Utah Division of Consumer Protection, the fraud starts with a job offer and ends with many Utahns wiring money to Mexico; only to discover they have been duped out of hundreds even thousands of dollars.

“This scam starts by answering an ad for a job found in the classified section of the newspaper,” says Francine Giani, Director of the Utah Division of Consumer Protection. “Instead of getting a job with good pay and great benefits, people discover they have sent money to Mexico, never to see it again. And, even more frightening, they have provided crooks with their social security number, driver license and bank account information.” Divulging that information to scam artists, Giani says, could hurt consumers for years.

According to the Division, the scam begins when a soon to be victim answers a classified ad for a courier position. The ad promises good pay, 401K and health benefits, paid vacation and mileage. In answering the ad, the victim is directed to an Internet website to fill out an employment application. Included on the application is a request for driver license information, supposedly for a “background check” and bank account information all under the guise that paychecks are direct deposited.

Investigators familiar with the scam say that information gathered from the phony job applications is used to forge checks, which are then deposited in the soon to be victims bank account. The victims are then notified that a deposit has been mistakenly made in their account and it is requested that they immediately wire those funds back to the company. But, they are told because of the trouble they are going through they can keep a portion of the money.

Hoping to impress a potential employer, the victims wire the funds as directed, usually to Mexico. A few days later they receive a notification from their bank that the original deposit has been voided because it was made with a forged check. The money that was wired to Mexico is long gone and can't be recovered. The victim will most likely also discover that his or her bank account information has been used on phony checks that have been deposited

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elsewhere.

One of the fears that consumer protection officials have is the long-term impact that this scam might have on victims. “Criminals now have all the key personal information from their victims,” Giani says. “Name, social security number and bank account; they could potentially use the information for years to come in a variety of ways: forged checks, identity theft, forged credit cards. We have some very frightened victims.”

Reportedly, losses from various Utah victims range from \$400 to as much as \$10,000. Some added irony in this scam is that some who apply for the courier jobs are told that they have been hired. They are then supplied with a package of checks with instructions about which bank accounts to deposit them in. The couriers are told to make the deposits and return the deposit slips to an address via overnight mail or delivery.

The couriers never see a paycheck. Instead they have become unwitting mules in this complex and far-reaching scam by depositing bogus checks into accounts. “State investigators working this scam have used bank surveillance video to help them track down the people who were making some of these deposits,” according to Giani. “One of them was a university student who thought he had stumbled across a great job. When investigators found him, he was mortified and thought that he would end up behind bars as a partner in the fraud.” “He didn’t”, she adds. He was just another victim caught in the web of this scam.

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